



### **In One Year, Out the Other**

**This year, try giving resolutions a rest and just do your best.**

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WebMD Feature

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Here's a New Year's resolution anyone can keep: Resolve not to make any more New Year's resolutions.

Now, wasn't that easy?

If you're trying to pay down your credit cards, quit smoking, get a new job, find a mate, or shed some excess poundage, abandoning New Year's resolutions won't get you off the hook.

But by setting more realistic goals for yourself and not limiting yourself to a once-a-year, do-or-die, all-out assault on that Everest of debt, those flabby thighs, or the hideous wallpaper you keep meaning to replace, you may find that the finish line isn't so far away after all.

Or as the Rolling Stones put it, "you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime, you just might find you get what you need."

### **Popular New Year's Resolutions**

According to USA.gov, the nation's official Web portal, Americans commonly resolve every January to:

- Lose weight
- Manage debt/save money
- Get a better job
- Get fit
- Eat right
- Get a better education
- Drink less alcohol
- Quit smoking
- Reduce stress overall and/or at work
- Take a trip
- Volunteer to help others

The Web site doesn't cite the sources for these popular New Year's resolutions, nor do they offer statistics on how often they are broken. But as the poet Robert Burns, author of "Auld Lang Syne," famously observed, "The best laid plans o' mice and men [often go astray]."

"The cycle is deprive yourself, and then binge and make up for it," says Elizabeth Zelvin, LCSW, an online therapist who helps people with eating disorders.

"New Years after New Years, millions of Americans make a resolution to go on a diet, and a diet is a way of eating that feels so depriving that you can hardly wait to get to the end of it so you can go back to doing what you did before," she tells WebMD.

Some resolution-makers last a week keeping their New Year's resolutions, and some stick it out all the way to Feb. 1, but very few manage to achieve their goal weight, Zelvin says.

As a therapist, Zelvin also deals with people who have substance abuse problems, and she says that the principles of 12-step programs are practical and effective guides to living, especially with their emphasis on setting attainable goals.

"'One day at a time' is the antithesis of making New Year's resolutions," she says. "It's not saying, 'I'm going to do this and keep it up all year,' it's saying, 'What can I do today?'"

### **The Hardest Thing You Ever Do?**

Darin P. St. George, a personal trainer who works under the pseudonym Trainer X at Gold's Gym in Natick, Mass., suggests that New Year's resolutions are as fleeting as the rose petals littering the streets of Pasadena after the Rose Bowl parade has gone by.

When Johnny and Janey Come-lately schlep into his gym on Jan. 2, resolved to turn their lives around with a new exercise regimen, their first training session involves a reality check to the gut, he tells WebMD.

"I tell people straight up: I'm not in this business to lie to you," St. George says. "This is going to be the hardest thing you ever do: you are turning back the hands of time. There are lots of machines in this gym, but there are no time machines."

It's OK to make New Year's resolutions, but only if you see them not as unbreakable promises to yourself, but as positive statements about possibilities, says **Jason Elias, PhD**, a staff psychologist at **McLean Hospital** in Belmont, Mass.

"What New Year's resolutions tend to be is a statement of your motivation of your intentions -- like a bit of cheerleading for yourself," he tells WebMD. "But the problem with that is that sometimes people set their goals too high, such as 'getting my life back on track,' and those things are way too big to keep track of, to know whether or not you're even making progress on them."

Elias says what can be helpful for keeping New Year's resolutions is public accountability: Make a resolution and share it with others.

"When people make a resolution and say to family and friends 'I'm going to lose weight,' that sort of 'outs' them and helps them stick to a plan," Elias says. "But if they don't have a plan, they aren't going to get very far, So the resolution should be something like, 'I'm going to wake up at 6 on Monday, put my shoes on, and go to the gym.'"

### **Accentuate the Positive**

The problem with most New Year's resolutions is that they tend to accentuate the negative rather than latch on to the affirmative, says Lynne Brodie of Carnelian Coaching in Ashburn, Va.

"Resolutions are all about taking something away from someone," she says. "No one ever says 'I'm going to get healthy.'" I think if people framed it differently and made it more of a positive experience, then it would be easier for people to keep resolutions, and psychologically it would make them feel a lot better about themselves."

In her role as professional and business coach, Brodie helps clients realize that when they talk about losing 20 pounds, their goal isn't weight loss, but looking better or feeling healthier.

"And if someone comes to me and says their goal is to look better, or to feel better, there are other ways, and it may not be about weight loss," she tells WebMD.

The first and most important step to keeping New Year's resolutions, therefore, is to understand your goals, perhaps with the help of a professional who knows how to ask the right questions and help you focus on what you really want and how best to achieve it, she says.

### **Accentuate the Positive continued...**

Life coach Marlene Gonzalez thinks it's fine to have New Year's resolution but doesn't think much of their effectiveness.

"I think you need life resolutions that can help you transform your life," says Gonzalez, president of the Life Coaching Group, based in Chicago. "Many people make resolutions at the beginning of the year but then they forget about it. They need something that empowers them to change and transform their lives."

Gonzalez says that people should develop personal power and accountability to make changes and take control of their lives.

"We're in an economic crisis now, and this has opened everyone's eyes," she says. "What we need is to look deep inside, really know who we are and what we want out of life, and put plans together."

### **'An Incredibly Good Idea'**

New Year's resolutions may not find favor with many professional motivators, but at least one is gung ho about them.

"I believe they're an incredibly good idea," says Gary Ryan Blair, who teaches strategic planning and goal-setting initiatives for individuals, entrepreneurs, and corporations. "No. 1, New Years is the only holiday that celebrates the passage of time, and No. 2, it's the first opportunity you have in the new year to remake yourself, to make your first commitment to change."

The challenge, says Blair, whose company The GoalsGuy has offices in Syracuse, N.Y., and Palm Harbor, Fla., is not in making New Year's resolutions, but in keeping them by honoring the commitment to change. To be successful, he says, a resolution -- whether it's for personal improvement or a sure-fire business plan -- needs to be specific, have measurable landmarks, and a solid deadline.

"If you mix all three of those together, and your resolutions meet those criteria, you will significantly increase the probability of success," he says.

Love them or loathe them, New Year's resolutions are nothing if not a time-honored tradition, and if after reading all this you still have good intentions of keeping your New Year's resolutions, you may wish to consider the following lines a brash young writer by the name of Samuel Clemens penned for the *Virginia City Enterprise* on Jan. 1, 1863:

"Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions," wrote Clemens, under the pen name Mark Twain. "Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual."